

Towards self-regulation

“Babies and young children often need to “borrow” our ability to manage stress, whether it is the adult’s understanding that all is well, or help to manage the strong feelings, or to work out what to do about it. There is a connection here, too, with executive function. Babies and young children cannot attend to much more than one thing at a time. They can switch their attention from a strong feeling of fear or sadness to feeling reassured with our support.”

Realising the Ambition: Being Me

A bit about self-regulation and young children

Some children struggle to manage their responses and emotions which in turn may impact on the way they present. They may appear to be very spontaneous, perhaps have outbursts, and seem easily overstimulated. Alternatively, they may present as being passive, perhaps too passive, and appear aloof or disinterested. If either of these presentations affects the child’s ability to engage socially and in play on a regular basis, perhaps they need some strategies to help keep them nicely alert and ready to play and learn. We want to help the child:

- use strategies to help manage their regulation;
- get ready to participate and cope with changes; and
- build their confidence to help maintain friendships.

Introducing self-regulation strategies can be a very successful way to help children manage their feelings and responses, but it requires careful implementation, close monitoring, adult support, and time. When trying to find out what strategies work best for a child, it’s a good idea not to introduce too many all at once. Go at a measured pace and monitor how the child responds. If they favour the support being offered to them use the strategy regularly.



Points to consider before implementing a new strategy

- Movement is probably the most important sense as it acts as the “gatekeeper” to our fight, flight or freeze response. It may be helpful to include extra movement opportunities throughout the day.
- Remember a child’s responses may change over time during the week and even during the day!
- As a staff, are you all clear on the purpose of this type of support being used with a child?
- Have you discussed regulation strategies with parents/carers, asked them what works at home and shared with them what works in your setting?
- Have you asked the Occupational Therapist or Speech and Language Therapist for advice or input (where appropriate)?
- How will you manage time to allow opportunities to support the child to practice this new strategy?
- How will you monitor/measure the impact of this strategy?

Working through emotional awareness can be tough for everyone whilst we work towards taking positive steps, helping our young children learn to manage their feelings. We also want you to consider your own wellbeing and so we hope you dip into [this resource](#) from time to time and enjoy it for yourselves!

Take note!

Every child is different and develops at their own pace.

The ideas contained within this document might have a positive impact quickly, but best practice would suggest that they are done consistently and with close monitoring to maintain the benefits for the child.

If, after using relevant support strategies for a while, you are not seeing a difference for the child then seek advice from your local Occupational Therapy Service.

We do not recommend a “one size fits all” approach and we caution you to be considerate of any possible aversions a child may have to some of the sensory interventions.



Psychological
Service Home
Visiting Teachers

EASEYS for ASN

Encourage And Support Early Years Skills for Additional Support Needs

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What can you do?

- Discuss what you already know with parents/carers and colleagues about how the child is managing their emotional responses and levels of alertness. You may find they already know which strategies work best and the child therefore needs more of.
- Watch the child playing alone, with their family or with their peers:
 - What do they look like when they are at their most relaxed? What are they usually doing?
 - How do you know when they are struggling to engage or cope? What might you see them doing then?
 - What are their coping strategies when they are disengaged or stressed? How do they manage?
 - How do they get out of situations they are uncomfortable with? How do they escape?
- Establish an agreed vocabulary to use (use visual symbols if appropriate) and help the child by labelling how they are feeling. What words are they already familiar with or perhaps their parents already use with them; 'I can see you are tired, upset, angry...'
- Introduce or trial a strategy which you think may get a positive response; 'Let's try this, see if it helps...' It may be something as simple as distracting the child. Remember to introduce the strategies gradually as it's easier to measure impact if we are only introducing one new thing at a time.
- Try out other strategies and build up a range so that the child is not reliant on just one. Some may work better in different situations or on different days.
- Gather resources to support the strategies the child responds to best and use them regularly - don't wait until they are in the "red zone"!
- Choice making is a useful skill to support the development of self-regulation. Begin by offering from a choice of two support strategies and gradually increase the number of options appropriate to their developmental level.
- Create a choice system to suit the individual child's needs and ability level. Perhaps use a credit card case with personalised strategy cards inside or give them a wheel of choices to spin or even their own keyring of strategies.

Tin of choice cards



Trying out strategies



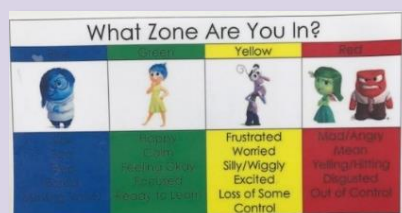
Emotion fan



Personalised keyring



Building appropriate vocabulary



Personalised strategy wheel



These ideas have been suggested or cribbed from a variety of sources and credit goes to colleagues, The Highland Council Occupational Therapy Service, and free online resources.

Useful websites and publications

www.bumps2bairns.com/social-emotional/

www.headspace.com/kids

Sensory Processing 101 by Abraham D., Heffron C., Braley P. & Drobnjak L. 2015

Play@Home by NHS Health Scotland, 2013 or Pinterest!